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ABSTRACT

This document presents the results of a survey of students at the University of Washington who indicated a special interest in child care issues. Interviews were conducted with 161 students, primarily nonparents, whose experiences with child care derived from participation as child care staff members or observers. Results showed that the respondents strongly supported university or state funding and user fees for the children of students, staff members, and faculty members, with lessened reliance on support by the student body at large. Programs designed to foster intellectual development were seen as the primary focus of child care, with physical and social development somewhat less important. Data tables are included. (Author/BRT)

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Child Care Survey

IER-214

July 31, 1975

Judith Fiedler, Assistant Director

PS008566

SUMMARY

Following the Winter, 1975 Student Affairs Survey of opinion on child care issues, interviews were conducted with a sample of 161 respondents who had identified themselves as having a "special interest" in the subject. The respondents were primarily non-parents, whose experience with child care derived from participation as staff members or observers. No parents participated in the University programs, and few reported any utilization of organized child care programs at any time. In general, the respondents strongly support University or state funding and user fees for the children of students, staff, and faculty members, with lessened reliance on support by the student body at large. Programs designed to foster intellectual development are seen as the primary purpose of child care, with physical and social development somewhat less important.

Introduction

The University of Washington Student Affairs Survey for Winter Quarter, 1975, dealt largely with questions of student interest in the need for and provision of child care facilities for student parents.* In addition to the questionnaire items, members of the randomly selected survey sample were invited to participate in a further study of opinion on child care issues. Respondents with a "special interest" in the subject returned a card included in the questionnaire (Appendix A) which indicated their willingness to be part of the study, and provided the Educational Assessment Center with the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the potential sample for the second phase. In all, 199 cards were returned.

In May, letters were sent to this sample, informing them that the study for which they had volunteered was about to begin, and requesting their cooperation (Appendix B). Interviewing by telephone began at the end of May. Almost without exception, the students who had earlier expressed interest were willing to participate in the interviews, although not all of the sample members could be located in the quarter following their original response. One-hundred and sixty-one interviews were conducted, following a set schedule of questions (Appendix C). This report presents the results of these interviews.

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*IER-207: Student Opinion on Issues of Child Care, Housing, and Food Services at the University of Washington, May 22, 1975

One special circumstance should be noted. In the regular quarterly surveys which are conducted for the Office of Student Affairs, a sample is randomly selected from among all registered students. Their responses can be assumed to represent the views of the student population as a whole. In the survey described here, the respondents were a self-selected sample. By definition, their knowledge about, and interest in child care issues is unlike that of students at large. The results of this study thus cannot be generalized to the entire student body. They are presented as the views only of a group with an unusual concern about the subject. This concern, however, is not necessarily a favorable opinion. We would expect that a proportionate number of students opposed to child care would also be represented among the respondents.

Forty-five of the respondents were parents. Despite their opportunity to have used child care, or to evaluate it from the perspective of personal need, however, their answers were in almost all cases highly congruent with those of non-parents Where the responses of parents differ, this is noted in the text.

In the tables which follow, responses are usually presented in the form of percentages of the total response to the question. Thus, where the question allows the possibility of more than a single answer, the number of responses may well equal more than 161. In most cases, table titles indicate the bases for the percentages shown.

In addition to the cooperation of the Office of Student Affairs, the design of the study was assisted by Mary Morrison, of the UW Child Care Coordinating Office.

Results

Given that the respondents in this study were self-selected on the basis of their interest in the subject of child care, they would be expected to be well aware of the needs and requirements for child care facilities. The first question tapped this knowledge, by asking respondents to identify the essential elements of an adequate child care program.

Factors connected with the characteristics of the facilities' staffs and programs were most frequently cited. With regard to the staff, emotional and personal qualities and educational factors are seen as almost equally important. Cognitive development is most often mentioned as an essential part of the program, with much less emphasis placed on the need for social or physical skills. It would seem likely that to these respondents the value of child care lies largely in its potential for fostering intellectual ability, with less concern for other aspects of group experience.

It is surprising that elements of physical care and safety are not more often listed. Perhaps the respondents are aware of the existence of state standards on these areas, and rely on these regulations to ensure minimum adequacy, although, as will appear in a later section, the respondents tend to ask for more than the minimum when specific program elements are described. The pattern of answers, however, makes it clear that to these respondents child care encompasses far more than simple tending in the physical sense. In addition to programs and facilities, convenience, cost, and utilization for educational purposes were noted as necessary aspects of child care programs.

In all, 404 characteristics were mentioned, distributed as shown in Table 1, by frequency of citation.

Table 1

Essential Elements of an Adequate Child Care Program (Percent of response)

	Frequency of citation	(%)
Qualifications and Characteristics of Staff		30
Emotional warmth, skill, and education	18	
Low child/staff ratio	9	
Involvement of parents in operation	3	
Characteristics of Programs		29
Development of cognitive skills	16	
Development of physical skills	7	
Development of social skills	5	
Outings, trips, experiences, etc.	1	
Physical Setting of the Facility		13
Clean, safe, spacious facilities in general	10	
Emphasis on adequate outdoor play area	2	
Emphasis on adequate indoor play area	1	
Physical Care Elements		12
Nutritional meals and snacks	9	
Medical and/or first-aid care available	2	
Overall health care program	1	
Convenience		8
Open all working or study hours	5	
Accessible, convenient location	2	
Facilities for very young children	1	
Cost Factors		4
Low cost, including hourly fees for temporary care	3	
Sliding-scale fees based on ability to pay	1	
Academic Participation		1
Student participation for training or credit	1	
Other		3

The concept of minimum standards was more directly addressed in a series of questions which asked the respondents to select the level of service which they would consider the minimum necessary for adequate care in the areas of physical development, educational development, and staffing. In the descriptions below, the first in each category is equivalent to the actual minimum required for certification by law. As Table 2 indicates, only a minority of respondents consider these minima adequate.

Table 2

Minimum Level of Child Care Necessary for Adequacy (% of respondents)

Physical Development	
Basic needs for food and a clean, safe environment	11
Meals and additional snacks, a clean safe environment, and planned activities to develop motor skills and coordination, plus some health consultation available	67
Meals, snack, plus a nutritional program and education for children and parents, regular health check-ups and consultation for the children, and a physical program designed to solve coordination and motor skills problems as well as help in learning problems	22
Educational Development	
Structured play and learning games, occasional skill development	25
Development of cognitive, conceptual, and language skills, with some educational supplies. Parents provide supplemental help.	55
Planned developmental training with remedial programs for learning problems. Cultural programs including drama, dance, and bi-lingual experience. Psychological, social, and diagnostic supportive services. Training and education for parents who act as teacher aids.	20
Staffing	
Staff ratio of 1 to 10 for most of the day for preschoolers. Warm and responsive staff members who like children. Several hours a month set aside for inservice training	27
Staff ratio of 1 to 5 for most of the day for preschoolers, at least 2 years of training in child development for staff members, regular weekly period for inservice training with some use of outside resources	39

Staffing (continued)

Staff ratio of 1 to 5 for all day for preschoolers, with occasional lower ratio for special activities and individual attention. At least some staff having degrees in early childhood education. Continuing programs of training for teachers 34

Rejection of the lowest level, however, does not mean that unrealistically high standards are demanded. In each case, the largest number of respondents chose the middle level of service, although this plurality is small for the item on staff quality and ratio. Faced with a choice among three items, of course, there is always a strong likelihood that respondents without strong preferences or opinions will choose the middle one. Our data do not permit speculation on whether such responses reflect actual choice in these instances. However, it must be assumed that those students who nominated themselves for participation have considered and made decisions on such subjects.

Interestingly, non-parents tended to be somewhat more rigorous in their standards than respondents with children. While the differences are minor, this appears especially in the evaluation of programs for physical development.

The first part of the interview treated the subject of child care in general terms. Question 3, however, introduced the topic of child care as a specific University-sponsored service for student parents. While a few of the respondents suggested qualifications, only 8% disapproved entirely of the University's assuming this responsibility, as is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Should the University Provide Child Care for Student Parents?

Yes	85
Yes, with parents also contributing	2
Yes, depending on financial or personal needs of parents	3
No	8
Other	2

Despite this strong approval for child care programs under University sponsorship, the majority of respondents did not see the service as one appropriately funded wholely by the University. A number of sources of money to support child care were named, as Table 4 indicates. Since each respondent was free to name more than one source, the table presents accumulated totals for the 330 citations.

Table 4

Suggestions for Funding Child Care Programs

Source	% Selecting this source	Amount of funding from this source			
		Less than 25%	25-45%	50-70%	75-100%
State funds (general or specific University appropriation)	41	4	30	51	14
User fees	39	9	37	39	13
Student fees	18	39	39	15	7
Federal funds, other	2	83	--	17	--

Child care facilities at the University now, of course, are supported by a combination of user fees and funds allocated by SAFC from fees which all students pay. To the survey respondents, these sources should be supplanted in large part by state money, with the savings primarily in the area of SAFC support.

The survey questions referred to "University child care" or "child care for student parents", without specifying eligibility requirements. In Question 5, however, the respondents were asked to define these, by listing the criteria they felt should be used to determine eligibility for participation. Although a very large majority (78%) stated that "All student parents" should be eligible, recommendations for priority in admissions were frequently noted. Table 5 gives these responses.

Table 5

Criteria for Determining Eligibility for Participation

All student parents (without qualification)	62
All student parents - low income priority	13
Full-time students given priority	9
Two-parent families considered on the basis of financial, work, and credit load status	7
Single parents given priority according to financial need	4
All student parents with fees proportional to income	3
Other	2

The detailed consideration which many respondents gave to questions of criteria for eligibility carried over into the following questions on the possible utilization of University child care facilities by parents who were not students. Children of families in University employment were seen as eligible by large numbers of students, while, as Table 6 shows, this acceptance was not extended to other segments of the community.

Table 6

Should the University Provide Child Care for Non-Student Parents (% of response)

	Yes	No
Children of staff members	83	17
Children of faculty members	79	21
Children of other community families	35	65

Somewhat over one-fourth of the respondents said that no special criteria should apply in determining eligibility for non-student parents. The majority, however, listed conditions under which these parents would qualify for participation. While in many cases the criteria do not differ from those suggested for student parents, Table 7 shows others which would be peculiar to the non-student parents, and which would clearly limit the use of University child care by these families. Student parents tended to be less favorable toward inclusion of community families than did non-parents. With regard to admission criteria for students, however, the parents opt for fewer restrictions on admissions.

Table 7

Special Criteria for Determining Eligibility of Non-student Parents
(% of response)

None	28
Space available basis only	18
Higher fees for non-students	16
Financial need	10
Availability of other community facilities	8
Employment status of parents	8
Financial need - single parent priority	4
Other	8

Question 10 asked the respondents to note the types of child care facilities needed by student parents. Most frequently mentioned was a generalized statement of concern for the provision of quality care. Other elements ranged over both specific aspects of facilities and programs and convenience to parents. Table 8 shows these figures.

Table 8

Types of Child Care Facilities Needed by Student Parents

High quality care for children	29
Both all-day and evening hours of operation	21
Nutritional meals or snacks	17
Location on or near campus	12
Parent involvement	2
Other	4

The issue of parent involvement, defined as the participation of the parents in the management and/or operation of the facility, noted above and in Table 2, was the subject of direct inquiry in other questions. Asked if parents should be required to participate, and, if so, under which circumstances should this be done, the respondents gave the answers shown in Table 9.

Table 8

Should Parents be Required to Participate in Child Care Programs?

Yes (without qualification)	62
Yes, on a voluntary basis	14
Yes, in exchange for fee reduction	2
No	22

Even with the respondents who specified a voluntary association added to the "No" category for required participation, it is clear that about two of every three who answered consider parent participation an essential part of the child care program. Among the reasons given for participation, in addition to fee reduction, is the encouragement of communication between families and staff.

Where parents do take part in the operation of child care programs, however, just over half of the respondents would require these parents to have some special training for their roles. Fifty-three percent answer "yes" to this question, with an additional 6% indicating that the training should be an option available to parents.

The most common experience which respondents reported with child care programs was as teacher or staff member, either professionally or as a volunteer. Of the 45 respondents who are parents, only 18 reported that their own children had attended child care facilities. A number of these parents, however, also cited teaching or staff experience.

The ninety-three respondents who had been personally involved in child care are likely to have used their own experience as bases for the suggestions which were offered to improve child care programs available to students, although the majority of improvements cited were references to factors such as staffing or physical setting which would be common knowledge to anyone interested in the subject. Parents, however, were somewhat more likely to cite longer and more flexible hours of operation, and expanded services in general, than were other respondents.

Forty-five of the respondents are themselves parents, with a total of 77 children. One family has four children, and 5 have three. The remainder are almost equally divided between one and two-child households. The ages of the children range from less than one year to over 9, with the largest numbers of children either one year or less, 6, or nine or over. Thirty-seven of the children are under 6, in the age range usually considered eligible for child care programs.

The largest group of respondents, fourteen, report that they do not make use of any form of child care except their own at home. Of the others, 10 rely on babysitters, and an additional 3 are assisted by relatives or friends. Nine families send their children to a day-care center, either cooperative or other. Only 6 among the respondents mention a pre-school, in some cases described as "Montessori school", "play-school", or "nursery school". It is, of course, possible that the day-care centers referred to could also be considered as child care centers, as the term is used in this survey. Whether or not the day-care centers are included, however, it appears that only a small minority of the respondents' children are in organized child care programs. No parents cite the University programs.

As would be expected for this group, then, the most common forms of payment for child care are hourly fees (8 cases), with the median amount $.75 per hour. Five families pay $5.00 per day, and another pays a daily fee of $7.50. Four respondents pay weekly rates, with a median of $30.00 per week. In the other families, no money payment is reported, with a number saying that they exchange babysitting or child care among friends or neighbors.

Whatever system of child care is used, the majority (58%) are quite satisfied with their arrangements. Where dissatisfactions are expressed,

they are most likely to be related to the scarcity of services in general (10%) or the lack of an after-school program (6%), and high cost (6%). Poor physical surroundings (3%), inadequate staff (3%), and miscellaneous other problems were also cited.

By far the largest number of respondents lived in two-parent families (79%) in which only one spouse was a student. Unexpectedly, only one-third of the students were graduates, although among the graduate student families, both spouses were more likely to be attending the University.

In somewhat over half the cases (53%) relatives of the respondent families lived in the Seattle area, in most instances parents or siblings. We would assume that these represent local students who are permanent residents.

Discussion

In a survey in which respondents are self-selected on the basis of their special interest and concern with the subject, the results must be considered descriptive only of the sample, and of limited use in predicting opinions in the population from which the sample derives. This study, then, permits us only to report on the responses, without safely generalizing from them. Under these conditions, what can be said is that for this small number of student parents and non-parents child care issues are important primarily in an abstract sense, since their need for an utilization of such facilities is relatively low.

The opinions expressed in this survey do not differ substantially from those which were reported for the Winter, 1975 random sample survey. In both studies the respondents in general approved of the provision of child care for students, felt that this service should be largely funded from State sources, combined with user fees, and should be directly linked to educational factors.

Twenty-eight percent of the volunteer respondents were parents, as opposed to 17% in the Winter, 1975 survey who had children. While it was assumed that the parents would nominate themselves more often for a study on child care than non-parents, an unexpectedly small group did so. By far the most common experience with child care reported was as staff member or observer of child care services, rather than as a consumer. While this factor may have increased the objectivity of their evaluations, it could also sharply reduce the respondents' immediate awareness of problems or inadequacies. This discrepancy might account for the pattern of responses which does not suggest the extreme lack of child care facilities which has

been charged in some statements. The parents in the sample rarely mention the use of child care programs which might be comparable with the University's. For this reason, in addition to the general unfamiliarity with UW programs, the responses offer limited assistance in evaluating the services provided by the University.

The findings of the study, therefore, cannot be considered conclusive. As supporting evidence of student opinions on child care issues, however, they can be useful input to the decision-making process in planning services for students, and determining appropriate allocation of available funds. Future studies which permit comparison of needs for child care with other priorities might clarify student requirements and preferences in this area.

APPENDIX A

I would like to participate in a study to assist in planning and evaluating the need for future University Child Care.

Please include me in the sample for the survey.

Name _____

Address _____
Street

_____
City Zip

Telephone _____

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